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A NON-MORAL CRITIQUE OF THE NORM OF ASSUMED OBJECTIV ITY

Master's Thesis in Philosophy

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to provide a non-moral critique of a particular norm of objectivity: the norm of Assumed Objectivity. The norm was initially described by Sally Haslanger (2013) with an intention to make precise Catharine MacKinnon's (1987, p. 50) claim that there is a link between traditional norms of knowledge and women's objectification. Haslanger argues that the norm should be rejected because under the conditions of gender inequality, adopting the norm actively hurts women while serving the interests of men. Rae Langton (1993) agrees with Haslanger in that adopting the norm has morally problematic consequences. However, Langton notes that a feminist critique of the norm should be able to address why the norm is bad by the lights of rationality. Langton thus sets out to provide a non-moral critique of the norm with an aim to show that adopting the norm gives rise to epistemically flawed beliefs about women. However, Evangelina Papadaki (2008) points to an inconsistency in Langton's argument thereby concluding that the norm evades Langton's critique. I will argue, however, that the norm *is* vulnerable to a non-moral critique because the norm fails to yield knowledge.

According to Langton, when one follows the norm of Assumed Objectivity, one forms two sets of beliefs: generalising beliefs such as *Women are submissive*, and essentialising beliefs such as *Women are submissive by nature*. The latter types of beliefs Langton dismisses as false. The former types of beliefs Langton declares as true, but unjustified. The belief that women are submissive is true because women actually are submissive, but the belief is unjustified because women have been made submissive. Langton concludes that since the norm fails to yield knowledge, it deserves to be rejected. This is the crux of Langton's non-moral critique of the norm. However, Papadaki points out that to say that women have been made submissive presupposes that women have not always been that way. If there was a time when women were not behaving submissively, then no one could have observed that they are submissive. Women had to be made submissive first and only then one could observe that they are, in fact, submissive. However, the norm is not to blame for bringing it about that women are submissive. Papadaki's conclusion is that the generalising beliefs arrived at by following the norm are true and justified.

I will show that there is a way to argue that generalising beliefs formed in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity do not constitute knowledge. I will draw on evidence from the semantics of generic generalisations (i.e., linguistic expressions such as *Lilacs bloom in the spring; Italians drink wine; Liberals are open-minded*), to argue that generic generalisations are implicitly quantified sentences. I will adopt this feature of generics to show that generalising beliefs of the form *Fs are G* can have two types of propositional content: *Normally, Fs are G* and *Fs are G by nature*. The former types of propositions are non-essentialising whereas the latter types of propositions are essentialising. I will argue that the norm of Assumed Objectivity yields generalising beliefs with essentialising content. Such beliefs, as I will argue, may be true, but they do not constitute knowledge because they fail to track truth in various types of circumstances. Since the norm of Assumed Objectivity fails to yield knowledge, it deserves to be rejected on epistemic grounds.

The thesis will have the following structure. In the first section, I will introduce the norm of Assumed Objectivity as described by Haslanger. After describing the norm, I will lay out the subsequent criticisms of the norm by Haslanger and Langton. After this, I will present Papadaki's objection to Langton. Then I will point out that Papadaki's account leads to underdetermination of belief by evidence. However, I will provide a solution to the problem as a result of which I will conclude that knowledge justifies belief.

In the second section, I will lay out a non-moral critique of the norm of Assumed Objectivity. I will propose that the contents of generalising beliefs should be identified in terms of their truth conditions, not in terms of their structure. I will use this as the basis for arguing that generalising beliefs can have two types of propositions as their contents. Then I will explain how generalising beliefs formed in accordance with the norm fail to constitute knowledge.

In the third section, I will provide evidence for my claim generics exhibit truth conditional variability by reporting the results of a context-shifting experiment I conducted for the purposes of this thesis. In order to account for the results of the context-shifting experiment, I provide a semantic analysis of a generic. I will argue that generics exhibit truth conditional variability because they are implicitly quantified sentences. I will conclude the section by deriving a truth conditional, compositional semantics for a generic.

In the fourth section, I will demonstrate how the semantic analysis of a generic sentence helps us to see how generalising beliefs can have two types of propositions as their content. I will explain the mechanism by which adopting the norm of Assumed Objectivity yields generalising beliefs with essentialising content and demonstrate how those beliefs fail to constitute knowledge. I will also point out that if generics are implicitly quantified sentences, then they are context-sensitive expressions. This means that the content of a generic is determined by the context of utterance. This feature of generics, as I will demonstrate, might lead one to use generics so as to make false assertions in contexts of practical reasoning.

1 The Norm of Assumed Objectivity

I will begin this section by introducing the norm of Assumed Objectivity as described by Haslanger. The norm of Assumed Objectivity consists of a cluster of epistemic and pragmatic sub-norms (p. 71):

i) *Epistemic Neutrality:* take a "genuine" regularity in the behaviour of something to be a consequence of its nature (applicable only in observations that satisfy the conditions in iii.)

ii) *Practical Neutrality*: constrain your decision making (and so your action) to accommodate things' natures.

iii) *Absolute Aperspectivity*: count observed regularities as "genuine" regularities just in case (1) the observations occur under normal circumstances (for example, by normal observers), (2) the observations are not conditioned by the observer's social position, and (3) the observer has not influenced the behaviour of the items under observation.

To illustrate the norm of Absolute Objectivity in action, Haslanger lays out the following picture. She observes that every time she waters begonias with ammonia, they die. She also observes that begonias reliably die after being watered with ammonia regardless of who waters them, when and where, she concludes that the regularity she has discovered is genuine (iii). Since this is the case, she infers that she has discovered an important fact about the inherent structure of the world: it is the natures of begonias and ammonia that render the observed regularity (i). Therefore, it is wise not to water begonias with ammonia, if one wants to keep them alive (ii). However, Haslanger (p. 72) notes, whenever the beliefs of an observer are not based on observation satisfying (iii), they are not justified by the principles of Absolute Objectivity. One gets around this by relying on a supplementary principle, which turns Absolute Objectivity into *Assumed Objectivity* (i.-iii. + iv.):

iv) *Assumed Aperspectivity:* if a regularity is observed, then *assume* that the observations occur under normal circumstances (for example, by normal observers); the observations are not conditioned by the observer's social position; the observer has not influenced the behaviour of the items under observation.

Let us then see how adopting the norm of Assumed Aperspectivity changes the reasoning from observation to belief. A group of math teachers observe that in their school, boys do better at math tests than girls. They form the belief that boys outperform girls in math. Since this belief is not based on observation satisfying (iii), the teachers go on to assume that their observations have not been distorted by the circumstances of observation (iv) – it is a genuine regularity that boys outperform girls in math. It is not an accidental regularity that boys outperform girls in math – it must due to boys' inherent cognitive abilities (i). Therefore, it is a waste of time to invest in training girls in math.

Notice that the crucial difference between Absolute Aperspectivity and Assumed Aperspectivity is that the former sets much higher standards for objectivity than the latter. Absolute Aperspectivity requires one to make sure that the observed regularity is genuine by checking whether the same regularity obtains in a variety of circumstances. If the same

regularity occurs regardless of the change in circumstances of observation, then one may conclude that the regularity in question is a genuine one.

1.1 Haslanger's Moral Critique

In this section, I will introduce Haslanger's critique of the norm of Assumed Objectivity. Haslanger argues that the norm of Assumed Objectivity should be rejected because under the conditions of gender inequality, adopting the norm hurts the interests of women while serving the interests of men. In particular, adopting the norm results in essentialising women's submissive behaviour with respect to men, even though women's submissiveness has been enforced by men. Due to adopting the norm of Assumed Objectivity, women's submission comes to be seen as their natural property. Since women are viewed as being submissive by nature, efforts at social change become unmotivated.

Haslanger claims that men objectify women in two ways: they view women as objects of their desire, and they view women as having an essence. The norm of Assumed Objectivity plays a crucial role in women's objectification in the latter sense. To get a grasp of this idea, let us begin by getting clear with what Haslanger means by objectification. According to Haslanger (p. 65), person A objectifies person B when:

(1) A views and treats B as an object of A's desire;

(2) A desires B to have a property and forces B to have that property;

(3) A believes that B, in fact, has that property;

(4) A believes that B has that property by nature.

Under the conditions where men dominate women, men view and treat women as objects of their desire (1). If men desire women to be submissive, men have the power to force women into submission (2). Men observe that women, in fact, are submissive (3), and based on their observations, they come to believe that women are submissive *by nature* (4). Note that there are two senses of objectification involved here. Firstly, men view women as something to use for their pleasure. Secondly, men view women as a substantial kind – as having a Woman's Nature. The second sense of objectification has a long tradition in Western philosophy. It is based on the assumption that to be an object is to have a nature, which, in turn, explains the behaviour of that object under normal circumstances. So, due to the norm of Assumed Objectivity, men view women men view women as having nature, which makes them submissive.

The role of the norm of Assumed Aperspectivity is relevant in the process of objectification. The norm, recall, permits the assumption of normal circumstances of observation. Since one is permitted to assume normal circumstances of observation, one comes to assume that the observed regularity in women's behaviour is disconnected from particular circumstances. By the norm of Epistemic Neutrality, one comes to attribute submissiveness to the nature of women. Notice how adopting the norm functions to mask the power asymmetry between men and women, which, in reality, is the cause behind women's submissive behaviour. It is also easy to see how adopting the norm results in status quo reasoning: since women are submissive by nature, women should be treated accordingly. When women are treated in accordance with their purported nature, they remain submissive.

Haslanger notes that forming beliefs in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity does not automatically lead to objectification. For person A to objectify person B, A has to view B as an object for the satisfaction of A's desire (1) and A has to force B to have the properties A desires (2). In other words, according to Haslanger, only the conjunction of the conditions (1)-(4) entails that A objectifies B. For conditions (1)-(2) to be satisfied, a power asymmetry between A and B is required. So, if men dominate women and they desire that women be submissive, then women submit to me. But if women observe that women are submissive and come to attribute submissiveness to Woman's Nature, women do not objectify women, for it is not in their interests that they are submissive (the conditions (1)-(2) are not satisfied). If women view women's behaviour as being driven by their nature, then women are what Haslanger calls collaborators in objectification. So, according to Haslanger, adopting the norm of Assumed Objectivity does not lead to women's objectification in all circumstances. Adopting the norm becomes problematic only under the conditions where men have power over women.

1.2 Langton's Non-Moral Critique

Haslanger's critique of the norm of Assumed Objectivity is moral for it pertains to the harmful consequences of adopting the norm. Rae Langton (1993) agrees with Haslanger in that adopting the is morally problematic. However, she also notes that a feminist critique of the norm Assumed Objectivity should be able to do more than pointing to its moral flaws. For, such a critique has its shortcomings: if a norm is evaluated in terms of its consequences, then it is a good norm for some and a bad norm for others. That is to say, a moral critique of the norm of Assumed Objectivity gives us weak grounds for condemning the norm. Langton thus sets out to provide a non-moral critique of the norm with an aim to show that the norm yields epistemically flawed beliefs. Langton, however, does not settle for extending Haslanger's critique of the norm – she raises two points of criticism towards Haslanger's account against the norm of Assumed Objectivity. I will begin by laying out Langton's objections to Haslanger, and then introduce Langton's non-moral critique[1] of the norm.

First Objection. Langton argues that Haslanger's account makes rationality unexplanatory by claiming that the pursuit of a particular norm of rationality serves the interests of men and hurts the interests of women (p. 365). Langton notes that in addition to providing reasons for condemning a norm of rationality, such a claim assumes that the pursuit of that norm is explained by appeal to self-serving interests – that men pursue the norm of Assumed Objectivity because it is in their interests to do so. According to Langton, it is a mistake to assume that the pursuit of a norm of rationality can be explained in terms of self-serving interests. A norm of rationality is a norm of belief and pursuing a norm of belief cannot explain why people act in accordance with their interests. Assuming otherwise is a matter of conflating reasons for believing and reasons for action (*ibid.,* p. 366).

To explain how these two sets of reasons are governed by different explanations, Langton provides the following example. A says to B: "Act like Elvis, and I will give you twenty dollars". Since B desires the twenty dollars, it is in his interests to act like Elvis. But is it in his interests to *believe* that he is Elvis? *No*, says Langton. The reason is, according to Langton, that beliefs and desires are importantly different sorts of mental states. She cashes out this difference in terms of direction of fit: beliefs aim at being true and once they do, they fit the world; desires, in contrast, aim at being fulfilled, and their being fulfilled is the world fitting them. Langton interprets the direction-of-fit as setting constitutive and normative constraints for belief:

[1] Langton labels her non-moral critique of the norm of Assumed Objectivity as a *Kantian* critique for two reasons: first, her critique is not consequentialist, and second (drawing on Kant's *Transcendental Dialectic*), she seeks to show that forming beliefs in accordance with the norm is bad by reason's own lights.

Constitutive claim: beliefs are such that they aim to fit the world.

Normative claim: beliefs ought to fit the world.

The constitutive claim is a claim about what a belief is, as opposed to desire. Beliefs, unlike desires, have contents susceptible of being true or false. The normative claim is a claim about what a good belief is: a belief ought to fit the world. A belief, then, aims to fit the world, and a good belief is one that does fit the world. Now it should become easy to see why B's acting like Elvis can only be explained by his desire for money. If beliefs aim to fit the world, then A cannot make B believe that he is Elvis simply by giving him money, for B is not Elvis. In fact, giving B the twenty dollars has nothing to do with the truth of whether someone is Elvis. Langton adds that what goes for belief plausibly goes for the norms of belief formation – one cannot rationally follow a belief-forming strategy irrespective of the truth of the beliefs it would yield. In short, the first point of criticism Langton raises is this: pursuing a norm of rationality cannot be explained by appeal to self-serving interests. Assuming otherwise makes beliefs explanatorily redundant.

Second Objection. The second point of criticism Langton raises against Haslanger's moral critique of the norm of Assumed Objectivity relates to a particular problem generally associated with consequentialism. If a particular norm is evaluated in terms of its consequences, then it becomes difficult to tell right from wrong. Adopting a given norm may have different consequences, beneficial or harmful, for different people. How to tell, then, whether that norm is a good norm or a bad one? Recall that Haslanger attacks the norm of Assumed Objectivity on moral grounds – adopting the norm should be condemned because it serves the interests of men and hurts the interests of women. In other words, adopting the norm has bad consequences – for women. Now, Langton claims that if the rationality of the norm of Assumed Objectivity is evaluated in terms of its consequences, it becomes inconclusive whether the norm deserves condemnation. If adopting the norm nevertheless serves the interests of men, regardless of the fact that it hurts women, then it seems to measure up to the standards of evaluation – from men's point of view. In other words, the norm is bad (irrational) for women, but good (rational) for men. "Too bad it's not good for us", Langton says, and concludes that condemning the norm on moral grounds provides no basis from which to complain. For that reason, Langton sets out to provide a non-moral critique of the norm of Assumed Objectivity. Such a critique, if successful, purports to show that the norm is bad by some more fundamental norms of rationality.

At this point, Langton is left with two tasks:

1. To explain why the norm of Assumed Objectivity is being pursued.

2. To explain how the norm of Assumed Objectivity is vulnerable to a non-moral critique.

Let us begin with task 1. Langton argues that the primary motivation to pursue the norm of Assumed Objectivity is that it appears to yield true beliefs. For, she points out that forming beliefs in accordance with the norm actually yields two kinds of beliefs. Firstly, by observing regularities in the world, an observer comes to form *generalising* beliefs of the type *Fs are G*. Secondly, from the generalising belief that *Fs are G* the observer infers an *essentialising* belief of the type *Fs are G by nature*. These second kinds of beliefs Langton dismisses as plainly false – essential properties of an object are not discoverable by observation. Langton's particular interest lies in generalising beliefs, which appear to be accurate, descriptive beliefs. It seems that

the norm in question, as a belief-forming strategy, generates belief states that purport to represent the world as it is. The belief-forming strategy, then, seems rational because in following such a strategy, one can aim one's beliefs fit the world. This, according to Langton, explains why the norm of Assumed Objectivity is being pursued.

How can one criticize a belief-forming strategy that apparently yields true beliefs (task 2)? To answer this question, let us rehearse what Langton has said about beliefs. Recall that according Langton, beliefs are such that they aim to fit the world (constitutive constraint) and good beliefs are those that do fit the world (normative constraint). Generalising beliefs, says Langton, may fulfil the constitutive constraint because they aim to fit the world. However sometimes generalising beliefs fail to meet the normative constraint: either they turn out false or they turn out true but unjustified. According to Langton, the generalising belief that women are submissive fails to meet the normative constraint because it is true but unjustified. The belief is true because women actually are submissive, but it is unjustified because women have been made submissive. In other words, the belief matches the world not because it has arranged itself to fit the world but because the world has arranged itself to fit that belief. The believer who forms beliefs in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity thinks that his beliefs have the correct direction of fit – this is why he pursues the norm. However, his beliefs do not, in fact, have the correct direction of fit due to which they are unjustified.

According to Langton, the norm of Assumed Objectivity fails to yield knowledge, which gives us a reason to reject the norm. Since the norm permits one to form false beliefs (i.e., essentialising beliefs) and true but unjustified beliefs (i.e., generalising beliefs), Langton concludes that the norm is bad norm by reason's own lights, and not just for its consequences.

1.3 Papadaki's Objection to Langton

Evangelia Papadaki (2008) has argued that Langton's attempt to provide a non-moral critique of the norm of Assumed Objectivity fails. Papadaki notes that just in case one follows the norm of AO correctly, the generalising beliefs arrived at are not just true, but also justified. In other words, Papadaki shows that generalizing beliefs do not suffer from a direction of fit problem, as Langton claims. Papadaki notes that Langton makes a mistake in ignoring the temporal ordering of events. For, to say that women are *made* submissive presupposes that women have not always been that way. Papadaki argues as follows. Suppose that there was a point in history (t_1) when women were not submissive, and not dominated by men – both genders were equal with respect to each other. At t_1, then, no evidence suggests that women are submissive. Since this is the case, one could not have formed the belief that women are submissive by correctly following the norm of Assumed Objectivity. For to follow the norm correctly one begins by observing regularities in the world. Since at t_1, women, in general, are not submissive, one cannot observe such a regularity and form a corresponding belief. So, at t_1, the belief that women are submissive is false.

Time goes by and gender relations turn hierarchical. At t_2, women are submissive and dominated by men. Over the time interval between t_1 and t_2, men changed the world to fit their desire of women being submissive. At t_2, then, it is an observable regularity that women are submissive and therefore, following the norm allows one to form the belief that women are submissive. So, at t_2, the belief that women are submissive is true and according to Papadaki, justified. The justification of such a true belief at t_2 derives from the fact that women already *are* submissive and not in the process of becoming submissive. The belief, then, is true and justified: there is plenty of evidence (observed regularities) suggesting that women, in general, are submissive, and one is justified in holding such a belief because women actually are

submissive. But if Papadaki is right, then the norm of Assumed Objectivity cannot be criticized for yielding true but unjustified beliefs. To demonstrate her point, Papadaki portrays two possible routes by which men's desire might have led them to form the belief that women are submissive:

Route A: desire – belief – change the world

Route B: desire – change the world – belief

Papadaki argues that the norm cannot play a role in route A. Forming beliefs along the route A, as Langton seems to assume, is a matter of fitting beliefs to desires or, *wishful thinking*. Since the norm of Assumed Objectivity presupposes intentional[2] mental states, the norm has no role here. Beliefs formed as a result of wishful thinking clearly do not count as knowledge, but the norm is not the one to blame because it has never been used in forming those beliefs. However, the norm does play a role in forming beliefs along route B. The world has been organized to fulfil the desires of those in power (men) and once everything was in place, then the norm was adopted to sustain the status quo – the subordination of women. Forming beliefs in accordance with the norm thus yields true and justified beliefs. What Papadaki has shown with her argument is that the norm of Assumed Objectivity can be used to *sustain* oppressive structures because it allows an observer to believe that the existing social order is somehow natural and inevitable. However, the norm cannot be used to *produce* a novel social order, given that one adopts the norm correctly to form intentional states. Papadaki thus concludes that the norm is not vulnerable to Langton's non-moral critique.

1.4 Towards Knowledge

In this section, I will point out that Papadaki's contention that generalising beliefs formed in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity are true and justified has the consequence that some beliefs might be underdetermined by evidence. This, in turn, forces us to broaden our conception of evidence. When we reason what we ought to believe, we reason in the light of our total evidence. For us to be able to reason with our evidence, however, we must assume that all evidence is propositional. Since only propositions one knows can justify further propositions, then we must conclude that one's evidence is what one knows. If our beliefs are inputs to reasoning, then it makes sense that our beliefs aim at knowledge, and not just truth, as Langton assumes.

1.4.1 Underdetermination of Belief

Papadaki argues that just in case one follows the norm of Assumed Objectivity correctly, the generalising beliefs arrived at by following the norm are true and justified. The belief that women are submissive is true because women actually are submissive, and the belief is justified because women's submissiveness is an observed regularity. The fact that women have been observed to be submissive is an evidential reason for holding the belief that women are submissive. An evidential reason is a fact *f* that gives one a reason to believe *p* just in case *f* is evidence for *p* (Reisner, 2013, p. 9). If we take it that the observation that women are submissive is an evidential reason for one to justifiably believe that women are submissive, then that fact must be evidence for the belief that women are submissive. It could be. Notice, however, that

[2] An *intentional* mental state that represents something in the world, being in a certain way. My belief that it will snow in June is an intentional mental state because 'snow' refers to snow falling down from the sky, at a particular time of the year.

same fact can also be taken as evidence for the following beliefs: women are submissive because they choose to; women are submissive but only after 6pm; women are submissive when they are married etc. If a single fact can, in principle, be evidence for multiple beliefs, then that fact, on its own, cannot be a reason to hold a particular belief. Thus, the observation that women are submissive is not a very good reason to believe that women are submissive because the available evidence underdetermines what one is supposed to believe.

One immediate consequence from the underdetermination thesis is that Langton's assumption according to which beliefs constitutively aim at truth turns problematic. For, if beliefs constitutively aim at truth, the role of observational evidence is to update belief. If our beliefs are regulated by observational evidence alone, then we form and revise our beliefs in the light observational evidence. However, if the available evidence can, in principle, be evidence for more than one belief, then the evidence available at a given time may become inconclusive. If that happens, our reasons for belief can no longer be evidential reasons alone: in some cases, we form beliefs beyond what our observations justify us to believe. But if that is the case, then some of our beliefs may not aim at truth at all. In the face of inconclusive evidence, we may end up believing what we want to believe, irrespective of the way the world is. Notice how the boundary between belief and desire gets blurry – there no longer seems to be any difference between believing and desiring. Are we forced to accept that some of our beliefs are justified on pragmatic grounds? Not necessarily. If we wish to maintain that belief, unlike desire, is a truth-directed attitude, then we need to revise our conception of evidence and see what happens.

One way to respond to the problem of underdetermination is to point out that our current conception of evidence is too narrow. For, so far, we have been assuming that all evidence is observational evidence. However, when we reason what we ought to believe, we reason in the light of *total* evidence. Our total evidence consists of our observations and testimonial evidence (e.g., scientific reports; newspapers; books; etc.). We hold those beliefs that are consistent with our evidence and drop those that conflict it. Timothy Williamson (2000, p. 196) has pointed out that for us to be able to reason with our evidence, we must assume that our total evidence consists in a set of propositions, which can be evaluated for truth or falsity. Propositions are the contents of what is believed, known, doubted etc., and thereby the primary bearers of truth. If all evidence is propositional, then, for instance, a bloody knife at the murder scene is not evidence, but the proposition *there is a bloody knife at the murder scene* is evidence. Now, whatever justifies one to believe a proposition is itself a proposition, and only propositions that one *knows* can justify further propositions. This, in turn, implies that one's evidence must be the set of propositions one knows (*ibid.,* p. 193). If so, then Papadaki is wrong in thinking that justification is a matter of having sufficient evidence for a belief. If one's evidence is what one knows, then justification it is a matter of knowing a proposition. Since evidence and knowledge are one, knowledge justifies belief.

If we must be able to reason with our evidence, and our evidence consists of the propositions we know, then it makes sense to think that our beliefs aim at knowledge, and not just truth. This, of course, does not entail that all beliefs do constitute knowledge. People once believed that the Sun orbits the Earth, but the belief was false because the Earth orbits the Sun. Thus, people did not know that the Sun orbits the Earth because knowing that the Sun orbits the Earth would have required that the Sun actually orbits the Earth. One cannot know something irrespective of the way the world is. That is to say, one cannot know a false proposition. Now, if the aim of belief is knowledge, then a good belief is one that satisfies the aim – the one that constitutes knowledge. In the next section, I will assess the beliefs formed in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity in the light of these considerations.

1.4.2 Clever Hans

Under what conditions can we say that some belief constitutes knowledge? What it takes for one to *know* a proposition? To draw some intuitions on what counts as knowledge, consider the case of Clever Hans – a horse that could do arithmetic. In the late 1800's, a horse named Hans drew worldwide attention in Berlin due to his exceptional abilities to solve mathematical problems. After having discovered that his horse was able solve complex mathematical problems, Hans' owner, Wilhelm Von Osten, had decided to take his horse on the road to show off Hans' skills to large audiences. For instance, Von Osten would ask Hans: "What is the square root of 16?" and Hans would indicate his answer by tapping his foot four times. People who saw Hans solving these types of mathematical problems came to form the belief that Hans can do mathematics. Did they *know* that Hans could do math? The belief that Hans can do math certainly seemed accurate: Hans seemed to be able to solve numerous mathematical problems with high accuracy. But is knowing a matter of having an accurate belief?

Not everyone was convinced that Hans could do math. Psychologist Oskar Pfungst designed an experiment in order to replicate Hans' mathematical performances in a controlled environment. The results of the experiment indicated that Hans was able to solve mathematical problems with very high accuracy only when the interrogator himself knew the answer to the question, and the interrogator stood at a close distance to Hans. However, in cases where the interrogator moved to a farther distance from Hans and did not himself know the answer to the question, Hans' performance accuracy dropped significantly. The experiment results indicated that Hans actually could not do math – he was just well trained in reading the interrogator's (who knew the answers) subtle ques that prompted him to give the correct answers. So, with a few changes in the circumstances of observation, Hans' ability to solve mathematical problems disappeared. In the experimental setting, people no longer believed that Hans can do math. The morale of the story is this: to know something is not enough that one is actually right about how things are. Knowers also would be right if the circumstances of observation were different in various ways.

Cases, like that of Clever Hans', imply that knowledge must be a relation between an agent and the environment. For a true belief *p* to count as knowledge, *p* must track truth in various circumstances. Following this intuition about knowledge, Robert Nozick (1981, p. 170-172) proposed a condition for knowledge as follows:

S knows *p* just in case

a) S believes *p*

b) *p* is true

c) if *p* were not true, S would not believe *p*.

The latter condition c) has come to be known as the sensitivity requirement (SEN) – a true belief that is sensitive to circumstantial facts constitutes knowledge. SEN nicely explains why people did not know that Hans could do math, even though their belief seemed true. Pfungst's experiment demonstrated that had the circumstances of observation been different, people would no longer have come to believe that Hans can do math. That is to say, the belief that Hans can do math failed to track truth in circumstances other than those in which Hans performed with his owner.

Accepting SEN as a condition for knowledge, however, comes with a consequence: the widely endorsed closure principle of knowledge (K) fails. This principle states that if S knows *p* and competently deduces *q* from *p* thereby coming to believe *q,* then S is in the position to know *q* (Hawthorne, 2014, p. 43). To illustrate, suppose you are visiting a zoo and spot a bunch of zebras. You come to form the belief that you are looking at zebras (i). Since (i) satisfies conditions a), b) and c), you know (i). If you know (i), then you know that you are not looking at a bunch of cleverly disguised mules (ii). Therefore, you are in the position to know (ii). However, if we accept SEN, then it turns out that you are not in the position to know (ii) because your belief (ii) does not satisfy the condition c). Consequently, you know (i), and know that (i) implies (ii), and yet, you fail to know (ii), which is an inconsistent result. The inconsistency stems from two mutually inconsistent knowledge claims: you know (ii) and you do not know (ii).

What to say? At the face of an inconsistent conclusion, it looks as though something we have come to accept as a premise needs to go: Either we reject either SEN or K. But it is hard to see how you could not know (i), so giving up SEN as a condition for knowledge is not a compelling option. However, it is equally hard to give up K because it seems plain obvious that if you know (i), then you are in the position to know (ii) – zebras are not mules. Fortunately, we do not have to give up neither. Instead, we can point out, following Keith DeRose (1992), that the knowledge claims that seemingly contradict one another are being assessed with respect to different epistemic standards. When you assert that you know that the objects of your perception are zebras, you mean that you know in the ordinary sense of knowing. However, if you claim that you know that the objects of your perception are not cleverly disguised mules, then you must be using *know* with a different meaning for the standards for knowing (ii) are clearly different from knowing (i). How *do* you know (ii)? Maybe one of the zoo officials actually painted a bunch of mules with black and white stripes to present them as zebras to zoo visitors. So, the verb *know* shifts its meaning between the two knowledge claims, depending on the epistemic standards for knowing each. This is why the seemingly contradictory knowledge claims are not contradictory at all: they simply express different propositions because the verb *know* is applied differently in each case. Knowledge claims, then, do not express complete propositions – their meaning is always to be understood with respect to certain epistemic standards.

The variability of the content of knowledge ascriptions explains how we can truly assert a proposition in one context, and falsely assert the same proposition in some another context, without contradicting ourselves. The epistemic standards relative to which our knowledge claims are evaluated vary from context to another. However, there is a widespread agreement that in *asserting* a proposition *p*, one represents oneself as knowing *p*. Williamson (*ibid.,* p. 238) goes as far as to say that "assertion is the exterior analogue of judgement". While Williamson's claim can be contested, there is something intuitive in the idea that there is an intimate connection between assertion and knowledge. But this may be more due to the observation that assertion is a speech act and just like any other social activity, assertion seems to be governed by social norms – we are usually held responsible for what we assert. If we assert something we clearly do not know, we usually get sanctioned for doing so. This idea has some philosophical background at least in Paul Grice's work. According to the so-called Gricean maxims of rational conversation, one should not say what one believes to be false and one should not say something for which one lacks adequate evidence (Grice, 1989, p. 27). Williamson (*ibid.,* p. 243) seems to concur for he has defended at length the knowledge norm of assertion: one must assert *p* only if one knows that *p*. Now, if one cannot know a false proposition *p*, asserting *p* entails that one does not know *p*. Since in making a false assertion

one comes to violate the knowledge norm of assertion, one is subject to social sanctioning for asserting something one does not know.

To conclude this section, I have examined what it takes to know something. I ended up arguing that true beliefs that track truth in various circumstances constitute knowledge. In order to illuminate this intuition about knowledge, I adopted Nozick's sensitivity requirement for knowledge: one's belief *p* is sensitive just in case if *p* were false, one would not believe *p*. The advantage of the sensitivity requirement captures the intuition that knowledge requires more than just accurate belief. However, accepting the sensitivity requirement for knowledge seemed to imply that the widely accepted closure principle of knowledge fails, and we end up making mutually inconsistent knowledge claims. However, we also noticed that if we interpret each knowledge claim being made with respect to certain epistemic standards, knowledge claims that seemingly contradict one another are not actually contradictory. This explains how one can truly assert *I know p* relative to one context and falsely relative to another context – the epistemic standards with respect to each knowledge claim is evaluated vary across different contexts. I also pointed out, however, that assertion is plausibly governed by the knowledge norm of assertion. So, if false propositions cannot be known, asserting a false proposition entails that one asserts a proposition one does not know.

2 A Non-Moral Critique of the Norm of Assumed Objectivity

In this section, I will set out to examine the beliefs arrived at by following the norm of Assumed Objectivity. I will argue that when one follows the norm in forming generalising beliefs of the form *Fs are G*, those beliefs fail constitute knowledge. For, by drawing on evidence from the semantics and pragmatics of generic sentences (i.e., linguistic expressions such as *Lilacs bloom in the spring; Italians drink wine; Liberals are open-minded;* etc.), I will argue that generalising beliefs can have two kinds of propositions as their content: non-essentialising (i.e., *Normally, Fs are G*) and essentialising (i.e., *Fs are G by nature*). This is because generics are implicitly quantified sentences due to which they can express different contents in different contexts. I will use this feature of generic sentences to demonstrate how generalising beliefs formed in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity come to have an essentialising proposition as their content. If beliefs formed in accordance with the norm have essentialising content, they do not constitute knowledge because they are, as I will demonstrate, insensitive beliefs. If the norm of Assumed Objectivity yields beliefs that do not constitute knowledge, then the norm deserves to be rejected.

At the end of this section, I will discuss one particular consequence of the claim that generics are context-sensitive expressions. Namely, if generics are context-sensitive expressions, they can be used to express different contents in different contexts. This means that sometimes speakers might come to make false assertions if they are not attentive to what their assertions convey in a context. In particular, there contexts where asserting a generic as a premise in reasoning leads one to make false assertions.

2.1 Belief Content

Recall that, according to Haslanger and Langton, when one forms beliefs in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity, one comes to form two distinct sets of beliefs: generalising beliefs (i.e., *Fs are G*) and essentialising beliefs (i.e., *Fs are G by nature*). The norm of Assumed Aperspectivity permits the move from a generalising belief to an essentialising belief because the norm permits one to assume normal circumstances of observation. By the norm of Epistemic Neutrality, one comes to believe that the observed regularity is due to the nature of the observed object. Why think these two beliefs are distinct? Consider Sander, who assumes normal circumstances of observation, observes that goldfish are orange. Based on his observations, he forms the generalising belief that (i) *Goldfish are orange*, which is an accurate, descriptive belief. But if Sander assumes normal circumstances of observation, then the essentialist assumption must be already contained in the generalising belief he forms. Thus, I propose that the content of Sander's generalising belief is the proposition (ii) *Goldfish are orange by nature.*

What I am suggesting is that generalising beliefs of the type *Fs are G* can have more than just one proposition as its content. This, in turn, implies that the propositional content of a generalising belief is not to be identified with its structure, but with its truth conditions. If I wish to argue that the content of a generalising belief is not to be identified with its structure, then I need to show that the contents of generalising beliefs exhibit truth conditional variability. My strategy (in section 3) is to draw on linguistic evidence to show that generic generalisations exhibit truth conditional variability. I wish to argue that a generalising belief can have different contents depending on the way the belief was formed, then I need to demonstrate that generics are context-sensitive expressions – that they can express different contents in different contexts.

How exactly generics are context sensitive? As I will argue, generics are context-sensitive expressions because they are implicitly quantified sentences. Those who agree that generics are implicitly quantified sentences, argue that generics express what is *usually* the case. That is to say, the meaning of the generic *Goldfish are orange* is the proposition *Usually, goldfish are orange.* However, I will argue that in order to derive intuitively correct truth conditions for generic sentences, one must assume that the domain of quantification is implicitly restricted to normal instances. So, the semantic meaning of the generic *Goldfish are orange* is the proposition *Normally, goldfish are orange.* The word *normally* here is not to be understood in a normative sense, but rather, in a statistical sense. What is normal is what one has come to observe on a regular basis. Thus, *normally* in this context is taken to something akin to *in the light of one's evidence.* So, as I will argue, the literal meaning of the generic *Goldfish are orange* is the proposition *Normally (= in the light of one's evidence), goldfish are orange.*

Notice that if generics are implicitly quantified expressions, then, if the range of quantification goes unrestricted, then they can be used to convey content that comes apart from their semantic content. In particular, if the range of quantification is unrestricted, then generics express essentialising propositions: *Goldfish are orange by nature.* Now, insofar as the content of generalising beliefs is propositional, then a generalising belief can have different propositions as its content. In particular, the content of a generalising belief can be either a non-essentialising proposition (e.g., *Normally, goldfish are orange*) or an essentialising proposition (*Goldfish are orange by nature*). Generalising beliefs formed in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity are inevitably essentialising due to the norm of Assumed Aperspectivity. If Sander assumes normal circumstances of observation whilst observing the colour of goldfish, he thinks that the circumstances of observation are irrelevant with respect to observed property. Thus, comes to project the observed property of goldfish onto unobserved goldfish. On the level of logical form, the domain of quantification is unrestricted. The normality condition that was supposed restrict the range of quantification to observed instances, gets switched off.

Next, I will ask: Do generalising beliefs formed in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity constitute knowledge? My answer will be *no.* Consider, again, Sander, who believes that goldfish are orange. Since Sander has followed the norm of Assumed Objectivity in forming the belief, the content of his belief is *Goldfish are orange by nature.* For Sander's belief to be true, goldfish would have to be orange not only in the actual circumstances of observation, but also in most circumstances of observation[3]. However, as a matter of fact, goldfish come in various colours, such as white, red, yellow and black. Thus, even though Sander's belief is true, it does not constitute knowledge for it fails to track truth in a variety of different circumstances. Since Sander's belief does not constitute knowledge, the norm of Assumed Objectivity deserves to be rejected.

Now, if Sander does not know that goldfish are orange, then it seems that Sander cannot not truly assert that goldfish are orange. That is to say, if he were to assert that goldfish are orange, he would get sanctioned for asserting something he does not know. However, if generics are context sensitive expressions, then there can be conversational contexts where Sander can truthfully assert that goldfish are orange. For, the content of a context sensitive expression is determined by the context of utterance, which entails that in some contexts the content of Sander's assertion can be interpreted as saying something different what he believes. Regardless of the fact that the content of Sander's generalising belief is the proposition *Goldfish are orange*

3 Note that the truth of the proposition *Goldfish are orange by nature* does require that goldfish be orange in all possible circumstances – generic generalisations are not universal generalisations. So, when one forms an essentialising belief, one grants that exceptions are possible.

by nature, there are contexts where he can truthfully assert *Goldfish are orange*. These are contexts where Sander's assertion can legitimately be interpreted as saying *Normally, goldfish are orange*. Thus, holding an essentialising belief *p* does not automatically mean that one would be making a false assertion, if one were to communicate *p* to others.

There is, however, a particular type conversational setting where Sander would be making a false assertion if he were to assert that goldfish are orange. These are conversational contexts where Sander's assertion can legitimately be interpreted as saying *Goldfish are orange by nature*. In particular, these are conversational contexts of practical reasoning. In such contexts, one must reason in order to decide some future action. If Sander were to assert that goldfish are orange, to use it as a justification to act or refrain from action, then his assertion would be interpreted as making an essentialist claim. But if one must not assert what one does not know, then why would Sander assert something he does not know? This is because reasoning with context-sensitive content can sometimes lead speakers to make false assertions simply because they are not fully aware of what their assertions convey in a particular conversational setting. So, Sander may not intend to communicate his belief to others, but since his assertion can be interpreted in different ways in different context, he might come to make a false assertion. This is problematic because we often come to believe what others assert. Thus, the context-sensitivity of generics calls for responsible communication.

3 Generics in Context

I will begin this section by providing linguistic evidence that generics exhibit truth conditional variability. In order to account for the results of the context-shifting experiment, I will provide a semantic analysis of a test case generic in order to argue that generics exhibit truth conditional variability because they are implicitly quantified sentences. Then I will derive a truth conditional, compositional semantics for the test case generic. This is what I will call the semantic meaning of generics.

3.1 Context-Shifting Experiment

To demonstrate that the truth values of generics vary with context, I conducted a small context-shifting experiment. I asked English speakers to judge the truth value of a single generic in two different contexts of use. I designed the context-shifting experiment as follows. I constructed two cases: one that contains a test case generic and one that contains a target generic:

> Test case generic:
> (1) *Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height.*
>
> The target generic:
> (2) *Men are career oriented.*

There is a particular reason why the test case generic involves Chinese Elms, and not a gender category. I aim to show that forming beliefs in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity leads to unsound reasoning in practical contexts as a result of an epistemic flaw, not as a result of political bias or prejudice. Some gender-specific generalisations may strike one as politically sensitive, which may lead one to think that the flaw in reasoning is more connected to preconceived ideas about gender categories. However, if I can show that the same flaw in reasoning arises in connection with generalisations about politically neutral terms, such as Chinese Elms, then there is a reason to think that adopting the norm of Assumed Objectivity fails to yield knowledge due to a flaw in reasoning.

Both test cases begin with a short introductory text, which, in the case of Chinese Elms states facts about the world, and in the case of men, describes prevailing genders norms in the world. In each case, the introductory text is followed by two scenarios, A and B. Both scenarios contain a generic sentence (boldened). I asked my respondents to judge the truth value of the embedded generic in each context relative to the facts or norms stated in the introduction.

3.1.1 Test Cases

Case 1.

Introduction
Chinese Elm trees are native to eastern Asia, where they naturally grow to between 15 and 20 meters tall. In the USA, Chinese Elm trees are rarely found in the wild. However, they are one of the most popular species to be cultivated in a bonsai form. These cultivated Chinese Elm bonsai trees rarely exceed 45 centimetres in height[4].

[4] This case is an adaptation from Jessie Munton's (2019) paper *Beyond Accuracy: Epistemic flaws with statistical generalisations.*

Scenario A
Andy asks for advice from his friend Laura on what to do with a new tree that has started to grow in his backyard.

Andy: "Wonder how tall this one will end up. Will it block out all the light for my greenhouse?"

Laura takes a careful look at the little tree, nods confidently and says:

Laura: "Don't worry. That's a Chinese Elm. ***Chinese Elms*** **are around 45 centimetres in height**. No need to cut it down."

Scenario B
Aslak is in a horticulture exam. The topic of the exam is cultivated plants and trees and their typical heights. One question reads: "In a garden of cultivated plants and trees, how tall are Chinese Elms?" Aslak writes down: "**Chinese Elms** ***are around 45 centimetres in height.***"

Case 2.

Introduction
In community X, gender roles regarding family life are clearly demarcated and well-entrenched. Men are expected to build a career outside home and be the breadwinners of the family. In contrast, women are expected to stay at home taking care of children and the household. Gender-role conformity is relatively high in community X.

Scenario A
A magazine journalist, Anna, is conducting a street survey in community X. The purpose of the survey is to map out observed differences between men and women.

Anna: "Have you noticed any patterns in how women and men behave differently?"

Anja: "Absolutely. For instance, **men are *career-oriented***, but women aren't. Men tend to put lots of time and effort in getting promotions at work. Women usually jump off of their careers after having kids."

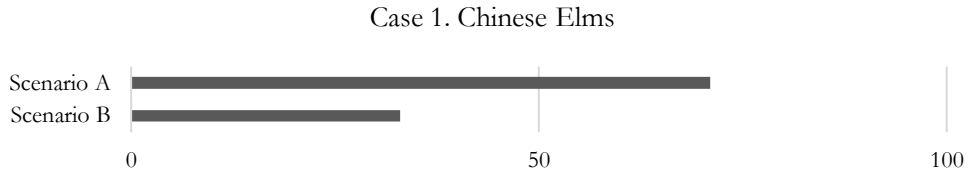
Scenario B
Pekka and Timo are members of the board of a successful tech company. The board is discussing a new hiring policy which would impose gender quotas in hiring.

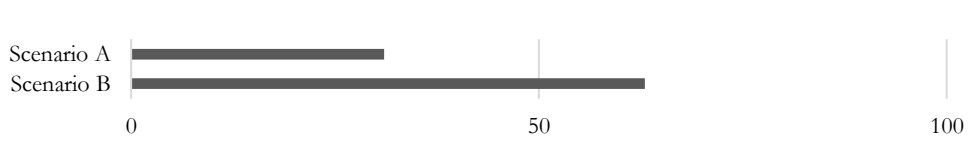
Pekka: "Some members of the board have opposed the proposal to adopt gender quotas in hiring. Are there any essential differences between men and women which mean that imposing these quotas are ultimately a waste of time?"

Timo: "Yes. ***Men*** **are career oriented.** Women always prioritise their family and home over their careers. It is in the company's best interest to hire professionals who are dedicated to their work.

3.1.2 Results

I received altogether 12 responses to my survey, half of which were from native English speakers. I asked the respondents to give their truth value judgments on a slider scale. Number 0 stands for *True*; number 50 stands for *Neither true nor false*; number 100 stands for *False*. The results of the context-shifting experiment are reported in charts 1 and 2 below. In both cases, the results indicate a clear shift in the truth value of the target generic between the two scenarios, A and B.





3.2 Semantic Analysis

The next step is to account for the results of the context-shifting experiment. I will provide a semantic analysis of the test case generic (1) *Chinese elms are around 45 centimetres in height* to determine its truth conditional, compositional meaning. This is what I call the semantic meaning of (1).

3.2.1 Logical Form

I will begin the semantic analysis of (1) by determining its logical form. Insofar as the meaning of a generic is understood in terms of its truth conditions, getting clear about a sentence's logical form is a place to start. The logical form of a sentence is an interpretation of its meaning, derived from its syntactic structure and the semantic properties of its constituents. Constructing the logical form of a generic is a matter of capturing and representing as precisely as possible what exactly the generic in question expresses. If a particular proposal on the logical form of a generic fails to satisfy the linguistic intuitions we have about its semantic relations to other sentences, then that proposal is likely to be rejected. In this section, I will contrast two opposing theories of the logical form of generic sentences: quantificational theory and kind predication theory. I will defend the former theory and conclude that (1) is best analysed in terms of quantificational theory.

Amongst semanticists (Krifka et. al. 1995, p. 23-24), there is a widespread consensus that generics are a variety of generalisations, with the small exception that they express generalisations without any pronounced component (e.g., *in general, usually, typically*) responsible for the generalising content they convey. Under such an approach, generics are analysed as implicitly quantified sentences with a logical form similar to explicitly quantified general sentences such as *Usually, Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height*. This sort of an approach is meant to capture the intuition that generics say something about what usually or typically

holds for the members of a kind, social category, persons, natural objects, artefacts, places etc. Since, however, generics lack explicit quantifiers, semanticists posit an implicit quantifier *Gen*, which is similar in meaning to adverbial quantifiers (e.g., *usually, typically*). Thus, *Gen* is the implicit component in generics responsible for the generalising content they express. The appearance of *Gen* in the logical form of a generic is due to the idea that competent users of English do not read off the meaning of a generic directly from its surface structure. Rather, they *interpret* a given generic as expressing a generalisation and thus, they read *Gen* into that generic. Under the quantificational analysis, then, generics have a tripartite structure consisting of a quantifier position, a restrictor and a matrix:

(2) *Gen* [Restrictor][Matrix]

Where *Gen* is a two-place operator that stands for an implicit quantifier only present in the logical form. 'Restrictor' picks out the domain of *Gen* – the set of things talked about in a given generic. 'Matrix' picks out the properties attributed to *Gen*-many elements specified by the Restrictor. To illustrate, the logical form of the generic *Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height* can be represented as follows:

(3) *Gen* x [Chinese Elm(x)][around 45 centimetres in height (x)]
'*Chinese Elms are such that they (usually) are around 45 centimetres in height.*'

Not everyone agrees with the idea that generics have a tripartite structure. Liebesman (2011, p. 411) has pointed out that *Gen* is unpronounced in every known natural language, and according to him, for a good reason: it does not exist. If *Gen* does not exist, then there is no basis for a quantificational analysis of generics hence, generics do not express generalisations. Liebesman advocates the so-called "simple" view of generics which I label *kind predication theory*. According to this theory, generics do not express generalisations but rather, they are a species of monadic kind predication wherein a property is predicated on a kind (and not on the individual members of a kind). Thus, Liebesman's proposal on the logical form of generics is indeed simple – it has a bipartite structure similar to simple atomic sentences:

(4) X(y)

Where *X* is a predicate variable and the bracketed *y* is an individual variable to which *X* is applied. Thus, under Liebesman's analysis, the logical form of (1) is represented as follows:

(5) Around-45-centimetres-in-height(Chinese Elms)
'The kind Chinese Elm is such that it is around 45 centimetres in height.'

One might immediately wonder what it is for a *kind* to be around 45 centimetres in height. It does make sense to say that concrete trees of a certain type are of certain height, but it is not entirely clear what it means to attribute properties to an abstract category, such as the kind Chinese Elm. Liebesman notes that these types of questions are not to be settled by semanticists and refers them to the metaphysician. Linguistically speaking, however, the kind predication analysis of generics involves a significant semantic complication: it struggles to account for the fact that generic sentences have more than just one reading. Next, I will cite existing linguistic evidence in favour of a tripartite structure of generics and thereby in favour of the presence of *Gen* in the logical form of generics.

Carlson (1989) noted that some generics are structurally ambiguous expressions. This feature of generics gives rise to two truth conditionally distinct readings of some generic sentences.

This is the case particularly with generics that contain two nominals. Consider Carlson's famous example:

(6) a. Sentence:
Typhoons arise in this part of the Pacific.

b. Reading I:
Gen x [typhoon (x)] [arise in this part of the Pacific (x)]
Typhoons are (usually) such that they arise in this part of the Pacific.

c. Reading II:
Gen x [this part of the Pacific (x)] ∃y[typhoon(y) & arise(y, x)]
Usually, in this part of the Pacific, there are typhoons.

6.a. is an ambiguous expression because the two readings of it, 6.b. and 6.c., are true under different conditions. The sentence in 6.b. is true just in case at least a good majority of typhoons, if not all of them, originate from the part of the Pacific in question. The sentence in 6.c. is true only if the part of the Pacific talked about is characteristically a place where typhoons tend to arise. The crucial difference between these two readings comes down to differences in the placement of the topic of each sentence. The reading in 6.b. is a generalisation about typhoons – it expresses a proposition that conveys information about typhoons as a distinctive weather phenomenon. The reading in 6.c., in contrast, is a generalisation about a particular location – it expresses a proposition that conveys information about what is characteristic about the location in question, not what is typical about typhoons. The topic of the sentence determines which part of the sentence gets mapped to the Restrictor of the tripartite structure: in 6.b., the subject nominal *typhoons* gets mapped to the Restrictor while in 6.c., it is the prepositional phrase *this part of the Pacific* that gets mapped to the Restrictor.

A problem with the kind predication theory is that it predicts, by default, only one type of reading for 6.a. – the one similar to 6.b. (without the quantifier *usually*) while the type of reading in 6.c. remains wholly unavailable. Liebesman acknowledges this, and suggests that there is a secondary, non-generic reading of 6.a. that can only be generated pragmatically. Consider the following example, provided by Liebesman (p. 426):

Speaker 1: The water in this area is beautiful! Tell me, should I have packed my raincoat when traveling here?
Speaker 2: Well, typhoons arise in this part of the Pacific.

According to Liebesman, in the above context, by talking about *this area*, speaker 1 forces the topic of speaker 2's utterance of 5.i. to *this part of the Pacific.* Speaker 2's utterance, then, cannot plausibly be interpreted as saying something about typhoons, but rather, something about a particular location. Thus, the secondary reading of (5), according to Liebesman, is the following:

(7) *Some typhoons arise in this part of the Pacific*[5].

The trouble with (7) is that it does not correspond to what speaker 2 says. For (7) is an existentially quantified sentence hence, its truth conditions are too weak to capture the meaning of speaker 2's utterance: (7) is true even if just one actual typhoon arises in the geographical

5 Liebesman (2011, p. 427) presents the logical form of (7) as follows: ∃x[typhoon(x) & arise in this part of the Pacific (x)].

location in question, at some point in time. However, speaker 2's utterance in the context provided implies that she is talking about a regularity of some sort. Thus, by uttering (7), she says something like: "It is characteristic for this particular area that typhoons arise here" meaning that multiple typhoons have been observed to arise there. This is much closer to the reading in 6.c. than the one in (7).

I have here contrasted two opposing theories about the logical form of generics: the quantificational theory and the kind predication theory. Given the evidence I have presented here, there seems to be no good reason to treat generics as instances of monadic kind predication. For generics, as explicitly quantified sentences, are structurally ambiguous. The kind predication theory struggles to account for the ambiguity of generics whereas the quantificational theory faces no problems in yielding the intuitively correct readings of generics. I take this as crucial evidence for the claim that generics are implicitly quantified sentences. Thus, I represent the logical form of the target generic (1) as having a quantificational structure as follows:

(1) a. Sentence:
Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height.

b. Logical form:
Gen x [Chinese Elm (x)] [are around 45 centimetres in height (x)]
Chinese Elms are such that they (usually) are around 45 centimetres in height.

3.2.2 Truth conditions

Now that I have determined the logical form of (1), I am in the position to formulate its precise truth conditions. I will begin this section by stating two basic assumptions I hold about the *Gen*-operator. Then, in the light of these assumptions, I will lay out preliminary truth conditions for (1). I will use these preliminary truth conditions as evidence that (1) involves implicit domain restriction.

I make two assumptions about the semantic properties of *Gen*. Firstly, *Gen* is an intensional operator (Carlson, 1989): it shifts the evaluation of a given generic sentence from the present state of affairs to possible states of affairs. This makes sense as the truth values of generic sentences are not dependent only on the present state of affairs: (1) can be true even if no Chinese Elm in one's sight is around 45 centimetres tall. Secondly, *Gen* is a quantifier with a semantics similar to an adverbial quantifier *usually*, which is an unselective analogue of the generalised quantifier *most*[6] (Lewis, 1998). Thus, *Gen* is an unselective quantifier that binds those free variables within its scope that are not bound existentially: individuals, situations[7] and worlds.

Given the logical form of (1), the predicted truth conditions for (1) are as follows:

(8) a. Logical form:

6 In linguistics, the precise meaning of *most* is formulated in terms of set theory: most(A, B) iff the number of elements at the intersection of set A and set B is greater than the number of elements in the set of those elements that are in A but not in B. I will use *most* with this particular meaning (Westerståhl, 2019).

7 I will adopt Angelika Kratzer's (1989) definition of situation according to which situations *s* are parts of possible worlds *w* and situations are spatio-temporally located eventualities that contain individuals, properties of individuals and relations between them. According to Kratzer (2019), situations and events are very much alike hence, in what follows, I will use the terms *situation* and *event* interchangeably.

Gen x, s. s ≤ w [Chinese Elm (x)] [are around 45 centimetres in height (x)]
Chinese Elms are such that they (usually) are around 45 centimetres in height.

b. Truth conditions:
Chinese Elms are such that they (usually) are around 45 centimetres in height is true only if most situations are such that Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height.

The predicted truth conditions in 8.b. are clearly too strong as they seem to require that most situations are such that Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height. If we conceive of the reality as consisting of situations, then we are in situations virtually all the time. Certainly, not most situations are such that Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height. Most situations are most likely those which do not even contain trees, not to mention Chinese Elms. Thus, it is quite fair to assume that 8.b. does not make a claim about most situations, but rather, it makes a claim about most of those situations that contain Chinese Elms. For, if anything, it is Chinese Elms and the property of being around 45 centimetres in height that make 8.b. true. This gives us reason to think that 8.b. comes with an implicit restrictor, call it C, that functions to narrow down the domain of discourse to concern only those situations that contain Chinese Elms.

In conclusion, the predicted truth conditions in 8.b. give us reason to think that the domain of the generic quantifier must be implicitly restricted. The domain of *Gen* must be restricted in such a way that *Gen* takes scope over those situations that contain Chinese Elms. The next step is to account for how C gains its value. My strategy is to adopt, drawing on Rooth (1985), a focus-based procedure in determining the value of C. This indicates that the value of C is pragmatically supplied: the way speakers emphasize particular parts of their utterances in a conversational context brings about truth conditional differences between the utterances of a single generic.

3.2.3 Focus

In the previous section, I argued that the Matrix must assume an implicitly restrictor C. The purpose of this section is to account for the way the value of C is determined. I will suggest that C is a free context variable whose value is determined by intonational focus in a conversational context. I will conclude this section by arguing that while intonational focus takes us closer to intuitively correct truth conditions for (1), there is still room for improvement.

I will begin by introducing the role of focus in linguistic communication. When speakers engage in a conversation with the intent to exchange information, a major part of that information is packed into their utterances. To make communication smooth and efficient, speakers usually structure their utterances in terms of what they take to be shared knowledge in a given conversational context and in terms of what they take to be new information for their audience. The part of an utterance that is used to fill a gap in the hearer's presumed stock of knowledge, that is, to bring in new information, is called *focus*. To illustrate, suppose that by uttering (i) "Evelin stole the cookies", I intend to inform you that it was Evelin, rather than Mart, who stole the cookies. Presumably, we both know which cookies I am talking about. What I take to be new information to you is the identity of the cookie thief. In spoken English, one of the primary means of indicating the focus of an utterance is through intonation. Thus, when I utter (i), I temporarily raise the pitch of my voice at *Evelin* to indicate the focus of my utterance, thereby adding a new fact about the identity of the cookie thief into our shared stock of knowledge. This is the basic idea of Chafe's (1979) notion of information structure as

information packaging that responds to the immediate communicative needs of the participants of a conversation.

In verbal communication, intonational focus can be used for various purposes. One use of focus is metalinguistic as in the following example: "He didn't kick the bucket, he *passed away*". The example I provided in the previous paragraph illustrates another use of intonational focus in communication: the one that functions to add new factual information into the context of a conversation. If one accepts as true what one hears, then that fact becomes a part of our shared knowledge (Krifka, 2006). In what follows, I will continue to refer to this particular use of intonational focus in communication.

Next, I will draw a connection between intonational focus and the implicit restrictor C. Mats Rooth (1985, p. 164) has observed that adverbial quantifiers are focus-sensitive. Consider the following example by Rooth (the focused element of each utterance is written square brackets):

(9) a. In Saint Petersburg, officers always escorted [ballerinas]$_F$.

b. In Saint Petersburg, [officers]$_F$ always escorted ballerinas.

9a. says that if officers ever escorted anyone in St. Petersburg, they escorted ballerinas. 9b., in turn, says that if anyone ever escorted ballerinas in Saint Petersburg, they were officers. To unpack the difference between these two readings, let us construct their logical forms. According to Rooth's (1995, p. 270) association-with-focus theory, this is done in three steps (assuming a tripartite structure):

1. Adverbial quantifiers always take sentential scope. Thus, the adverbial quantifier *always* occupies the quantifier position of the tripartite structure in (9).
2. The Restrictor is a free variable, which is specified by the focus structure of an utterance: the non-focused elements of a sentence occupy the restrictor.
3. The focused element of an utterance occupies the Matrix, representing the scope of *always*.

In sum, the adverbial quantifier *always* quantifies over the non-focused elements of an utterance, with its scope on the focused element of an utterance. Thus, the logical forms of 9a. and 9b. are the following:

9.a. *Always* C. s, x. s ≤ w [s: officers escorted x in s in St. P.] [s: x is ballerina in s in St. P.]

Restrictor: situations s where officers escorted x in St. Petersburg

Matrix: situations s where x is a ballerina

9b. *Always* C. s, x. s ≤ w [s: x escorted ballerinas in s in St. P.] [s: x is an officer in s in St. P.]

Restrictor: situations s where x escorted ballerinas in St. Petersburg

Matrix: situations s where x is an officer

There are two points to be made about the logical forms presented above. Firstly, adverbial quantifiers are sensitive to intonational focus. The placement of focus in a sentence within the scope of an adverbial quantifier determines which segment of that sentence gets mapped to the Restrictor (i.e., domain), and which segment gets mapped to the Matrix (i.e., scope). Secondly, focus automatically restricts the domain of an adverbial quantifier by placing the non-focused part of a sentence into the Restrictor. Focus thus functions as a contextually supplied implicit restrictor in adverbially quantified sentences. Since *Gen* is given the semantics of an adverbial quantifier, I will adopt Rooth's focus-based procedure to fix the value of the implicit restrictor C in (1) as follows:

10.a. Sentence:
Chinese Elms are [around 45 centimetres in height]$_F$.

Usually C. s, x. s ≤ w [s: Chinese Elms are in s & Chinese Elms exhibit a particular height in s] [s: x is 45 cm in s]

Restrictor: situations s which contain Chinese Elms and where they exhibit a particular height

Matrix: situations s where the height of Chinese Elms is 45 centimetres

10.b. Sentence:
[Chinese elms]$_F$ are around 45 centimetres in height.

Usually C. s, x. s ≤ w [s: x is in s & x is around 45 centimetres in height in s] [s: x is the maximal plurality of Chinese Elms in w]

Restrictor: situations s which contain x and x is around 45 centimetres in height s

Matrix: situations s where x is the maximal plurality of Chinese Elms is around 45 centimetres in height

The predicted truth conditions of 10a.-b. are as follows:

11.a. *Chinese Elms are* [*around 45 centimetres in height*]$_F$ is true just in case most situations where Chinese Elms are of particular height, they are situations where they are around 45 centimetres in height.

11.b. [*Chinese elms*]$_F$ *are around 45 centimetres in height* is true just in case most situations where the set of all things around 45 centimetres in height are situations where Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height.

The truth conditions in 11a.-b., given the focus-induced implicit restrictor C, are clearly better than those in 8a.-b. However, there is still room for improvement. For, 11a. implies that Chinese Elms, and no other things in the world, are around 45 centimetres in height. Surely there are other things in the world that are of the same height. 11b., in turn, implies that if Chinese Elms are of particular height, they are around 45 centimetres in height. However, as we already know, Chinese Elms in the wild grow to between 15 and 20 metres tall. Hence, approximately 45 centimetres is not the only height for Chinese Elms. In other words, the truth conditions in 11a.-b. are still a bit too strong to yield intuitively correct truth conditions for

10a.-b. What I will propose in the next section is that we add an additional piece of information to C: a normality condition.

3.2.4 Normality

In this section, I will provide a further reason to think that the domain of the generic quantifier is implicitly restricted. For, if we assume that generics denote non-accidental patterns of events in the world, then the domain of the generic quantifier must be restricted to situation types. I will argue that these situation types are individuated in terms of how well they correspond to the normal course of events in the world. More precisely, normality here is understood as corresponding to a statistical sense of normality. What is normal is what one has come to observe in the past. Thus, the meaning of *normal* is, in this context, the same as *in the light of one's evidence.* I will conclude this section by adding a normality condition to the implicit restrictor C in (1), which, as will I claim, yields intuitively correct truth conditions for (1).

One prominent feature of generic sentences is that their truth conditions seem to connect them, at best, very loosely to particular facts about the world. Consider the following example:

(13) *Indrek plays tennis.*

(13) may be true even if Indrek is not playing tennis right now. If we assume that (13) is not an entirely accidental generalisation, (13) seems to denote a certain kind of regularity or, a pattern of events in the world[8]. If that is the case, then it seems reasonable to think that if (13) is true, it is true of situations of a particular type. For, if it is true that Indrek plays tennis, then he presumably plays tennis on a regular basis as generics do not report isolated facts. However, upon hearing that Indrek plays tennis, we do not go on to assume that he plays tennis all the time and everywhere. Rather, we quite readily assume that, at the very least, Indrek plays tennis when the circumstances are most favourable for playing tennis: there is a tennis court, a tennis racket, a tennis ball and whatever else is needed for playing tennis. Importantly, these circumstances are considered as *normal* for playing tennis. One could, in principle, play tennis outside when it is minus 30 degrees Celcius, but such circumstances are quite abnormal for playing tennis due to which it rarely, if ever, happens. I thus suggest that the situations that ground the truth of (13) are individuated according to the normal course of events in the world.

Let us, then, see how we can make this picture a bit more precise. First, I will explain schematically how the normality restriction is accomplished on the level of the logical form of generics and then provide an example. Consider generic *g* of the form K Φs, uttered in context *c*. Suppose that the focus structure of *g* in *c* yields the set S: situations where someone Φs. Since g presumably denotes a pattern of events that are normal with respect to Φing, *Gen* only takes scope over a subset S' of S: situations that are normal with respect to Φing. To calculate S', we add to S what Kratzer (1991, p. 644) calls a stereotypical ordering source, which ranks all situations in S according to the normal course of events in a world w. This means that for any pair of situations s and s' in S, s is closer than s' to the way things normally go in the world. To illustrate:

8 I grant that this assumption may strike as epistemically problematic. For, in reality, we do not have a cognitive access to purely accidental and non-accidental regularities. As Carlson notes (2008, p. 25, 30) every time we draw a generalisation, we are making a guess whether the generalisation in question holds or is entirely accidental. In principle, all our generalisations could be accidental – there is no way of proving otherwise. However, Carlson says, this sort of position with respect to the stability of generalisations is extremely sceptical. For such sceptic, detecting any sort of order in the world would be surprising. After all, the world is surprisingly orderly.

(14) Sentence:
Indrek [*plays tennis*]$_F$.

Logical form:
Gen s, x. s ≤ w [s: Indrek is x in s & s is normal w.r.t. playing tennis] [s: Indrek plays tennis in s]

One may, however, immediately spot a problem in the above analysis: there are two appeals to normalcy conditions in the logical form of (14). The logical form in (14) seems to be equal to: *In normal tennis playing situations, Indrek normally plays tennis.* This means that in order to provide truth conditions for (14), we would have to specify two normalcy conditions. What seems to be required here is relevant quantification, as proposed by Krifka et. al. (1995, p. 31). This means that we take *Gen* to quantify over those normal situations that are *relevant*[9] for the generalisation at hand. With regards to (14), the relevant situations are those which are normal with respect to *Indrek's* tennis playing. Let us, then, replace the logical form in (14) with the logical form in (15):

(15) Logical form:
Gen s, x. s ≤ w [s: Indrek is x in s & s is normal w.r.t. Indrek's tennis playing] [s: Indrek is playing tennis in s]

The logical form in (15) says that in those situations that are normal with respect to Indrek's tennis playing habits, Indrek normally plays tennis. That is, not only *Gen* quantifies over normal situations for tennis playing, but it also quantifies over those situations which are normal for Indrek to play tennis. Schematically, the set S' of normal situations with respect to Φing is further restricted to the set S": situations that are relevant for *K's* Φing. The predicted truth conditions for (15) are as follows:

(15) *Indrek* [*plays tennis*]$_F$ is true just in case most situations that contain Indrek and that are normal with respect to Indrek's tennis playing are situations where he plays tennis.

Having added the normality condition to C, I believe I have arrived at a plausible hypothesis on the meaning of (13). My final task for this section is to apply the normality condition to the implicit restrictor C in (1). Before I can apply the normality restriction to the truth conditions of (1), however, there is a point to be made about an important difference between the two generics, (1) and (13). While (13) expresses a regularity of action, namely, playing tennis, (1) seems to express a state of being. Thus, it is fairly easy to conceive of (13) as generalising over events where Indrek plays tennis. However, it is less intuitive that (1) generalises over events where Chinese Elms are of particular height as being of certain height is a rather stable property of an object. In fact, this is an assumption at the core of Davidsonian semantics for action verbs (Davidson, 1967). Verbs that express a temporary change in one's state of being (e.g., jump, dance, run, eat) assume an implicit event argument. In contrast, verbs that express a more or less permanent state of being (e.g., be, own, know) do not assume such an event argument. The former types of verbs are called episodic verbs and the latter are called stative verbs.

9 Schubert & Pelletier (1987) offer a discussion of how relevance restriction arises – e.g., via presupposition, focus, linguistic context or explicit restriction.

Now, given a Davidsonian semantics for verbs, it is not clear how (1) could possibly express a generalisation over normal events as its main verb (i.e., the copula *be*) is stative[10]. However, Schubert & Pelletier (1989, p. 232) have argued that predicates that are not normally interpreted as episodic (i.e., as having a situation variable) can be coerced into an episodic interpretation in certain syntactic contexts. This type of coercion often takes place in *if/when*-clauses. For instance, the generic i) *People are overweight* has a non-episodic meaning, but when it is embedded in an *if/when*-clause, then it becomes episodic: ii) *When people are overweight, they often exercise.* In this case, the *when*-clause gets a temporal reading – it denotes situations where people exhibit the property of being overweight. Thus, ii) says that the situations where people exhibit the property of being overweight can be extended to situations where they exercise. But how exactly does ii) get a temporal reading? Lewis (1975) has an explanation: general indicatives, such as ii), assume an implicit adverbial quantifier such that ii) actually means iii) *Usually, when people are overweight, they often exercise.* The adverbial quantifier *usually* quantifies over situations which explain the temporal interpretation of the *when*-clause in ii). In a similar vein, i) can get a temporal reading if we assume that it is interpreted within the scope of the generic quantifier *Gen* that has a semantics of *usually*. The restrictor of i) is just supplied pragmatically (e.g., focus-induced domain restriction). In conclusion, (1) can be interpreted as generalising over normal situations. Along with that note, let us add the normality condition to the implicit restrictor C of our test case generic:

(16) a. Sentence:
Chinese Elms are [around 45 centimetres in height]$_F$.

Gen C. s, x. [s: Chinese Elms are x in s & s is normal w.r.t. the height of Chinese Elms] [s: Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height in s]

Restrictor: situations s that contain Chinese Elms and where Chinese Elms are of particular height and that are normal with respect to the height of Chinese Elms

Matrix: situations s where Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height

b. Sentence:
[Chinese elms]$_F$ are around 45 centimetres in height.

Gen C. s, x [s: x is in s & x is around 45 cm in height in s & s is normal w.r.t. the characteristics of x] [s: x is the maximal plurality of Chinese Elms in w']

Restrictor: situations s that contain x and where x is around 45 centimetres in height and are normal with respect to the characteristics of x

Matrix: situations s where x is the maximal plurality of Chinese Elms in w'

The predicted truth conditions for 16.a.-b. are as follows:

16.a. *Chinese Elms* [*are around 45 centimetres in height*]$_F$ is true just in case most situations that contain Chinese Elms and where Chinese Elms exhibit a particular height and that are normal with respect to the height of Chinese Elms are situations where Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height.

[10] Cf. Kratzer (1995, p. 126)

16.b. [*Chinese elms*]$_F$ *are around 45 centimetres in height* is true just in case most situations that contain x, and where x is around 45 centimetres in height and that are normal with respect to the characteristics of x are situations where Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height.

In this section, I have demonstrated that (1) exhibits truth conditional variability in different contexts of utterance. I have argued that (1) exhibits truth conditional variability because (1) is an implicitly quantified sentence. I have also argued that in order to derive intuitively correct truth conditions for (1) we must assume that the domain of quantification is pragmatically restricted by the focus structure of a particular utterance of (1), and a normality condition. My conclusion is the semantic meaning of (1) is *Normally, (= in the light of one's evidence), Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height*. However, as we will see later, since (1) is an implicitly quantified sentence, it can be used to express different contents in different contexts. In the next section, I will account for the shift in the truth value of (1) in terms of content shifting.

4 Generics and the Norm of Assumed Objectivity

In section 2, I proposed that the content of generalising beliefs formed in accordance with the norm of Assumed Objectivity is essentialising. This is because those beliefs already contain the assumption that the observed regularity is due the observed object's nature. The semantic analysis of (1) in the previous section helps us to see how the propositional content of generalising beliefs can be essentialising. In this section, I will explain how adopting the norm of Assumed Objectivity generates generalising beliefs that have essentialising propositions as their content. Then I will demonstrate why these beliefs fail to constitute knowledge. I will also make the case that if generics are implicitly quantified sentences, then they are context-sensitive expressions. This, in turn, means that the content of a particular generic is determined by the context of utterance. Due to the context-sensitivity of generics sentences, in certain contexts of practical reasoning, one might end up making false assertions.

Next, I will explain how adopting the norm of Assumed Objectivity yields generalising beliefs with essentialising content. Recall that the norm of Assumed Aperspectivity permits one to *assume* normal circumstances of observation whenever one observes a regularity in the world. Due to such an assumption, one does not consider the possibility that observed regularity could be connected to particular circumstances of observation. Now, if the circumstances of observation are presumed to be disconnected from the observed regularity, by the norm of Epistemic Neutrality, one comes to attribute the observed regularity to the observed object's nature. Based on one's observations, one comes to form the belief (i) *Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height* but the propositional content of the belief is (ii) *Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres by nature.* This can be explained on the level of the logical form of (i): due to the assumption of normal circumstances of observation, the generic quantifier goes entirely unrestricted. When the generic quantifier is entirely unrestricted, it quantifies over most circumstances, thus yielding the proposition (ii) as the content of (i). For (ii) to be true, Chinese Elms would have to be around 45 centimetres in height in most circumstances. However, as we know, Chinese Elms in the wild grow up to 15 to 20 metres in height. Thus, (ii) may be a true belief, but it is insensitive: it fails to track truth in other possible circumstances of observation. In conclusion, the norm of Assumed Objectivity yields generalising beliefs that fail to constitute knowledge.

4.1 Generics in Conversation

In this section, I will account for the shift in the truth value of (1) and (2) between the two contexts of conversation. The utterances of (1) and (2) shift their truth values because those utterances convey different contents in the two contexts of conversation. I will also point out that in contexts of practical reasoning, if one asserts a generic as a premise in justifying future action or inaction, then one will making a false assertion. I will conclude this section noting that communicating generics calls for responsible communication.

Horticulture exam. Aslak is taking a horticulture exam. The topic of the exam is cultivated plants and trees and their typical heights. One of the exam questions reads: "In a garden of cultivated plants and trees, how tall are Chinese Elms?" This exam question is a request for Aslak to express what he has come to learn about the height of *cultivated* Chinese Elms. In other words, the exam question asks Aslak to state the height of cultivated Chinese Elms in the light of his evidence. When Aslak replies: "Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height", his reply is interpreted as saying: "Normally, (cultivated) Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in

height". Since Aslak's response to the exam question lines up with the facts about the world, Aslak's response is judged as true.

Andy's Tree. Andy is wondering what kind of a tree has started to grow in his backyard. He is concerned whether the little tree will end up so tall that it will eventually block out all the light from his greenhouse. Thus, Andy needs information to decide what to do with the little tree: whether to cut down the tree or not. He thinks his friend Laura knows more about trees than he does, so he asks Laura: "Should I cut it down?" Laura takes a look at the little tree and identifies the tree as a Chinese Elm. Laura then asserts: "Chinese Elms are around 45 centimetres in height. No need to cut it down." Laura's assertion can be interpreted as making an essentialist claim because she uses her assertion as a premise to refrain from action. In making her assertion about the height of Chinese Elms, Laura seems to be projecting a previously observed property of Chinese Elms (namely, their maximal height) onto this novel instance. Since Laura's assertion clearly conveys a proposition that contradicts with the facts about the world, Laura's assertion is judged as false.

Generalisations about gender categories are often essentialising due to the failure to see that gender-specific behaviours are, by and large, affected by the social norms that govern the behaviour individuals. That is to say, the truth of generalising beliefs about gender categories formed on the basis of observation are dependent on the contingent features of social organisation.

Career oriented men. A magazine journalist, Anna, is conducting a street survey in order to map out people's perceptions on the observed differences between men and women. Anna stops Anja to ask her whether she has noticed any patterns in how women and men behave differently. Anna's question is clearly a request for Anja to report her past observations. Anja replies by telling that "Men are career oriented". Since Anna's question is backward-looking in that she is interested to know how men and women are different in the light Anja's past observations, Anja's assertion is interpreted as conveying the proposition *Normally, men are career oriented.* Notice that Anja's reply to Anna's question does not conflict with what the social norms of their community prescribe.

The members of the board of a successful tech company have been deliberating over a new hiring policy which would impose gender quotas in hiring. Some members of the board have opposed the proposal. On a board meeting, Pekka, a member of the board, asks other members whether there are some essential differences between men and women that would justify the rejection of the new policy proposal. That is to say, Pekka is after some good reasons to refrain from future action. Timo is one of those members of the board who object the policy change. He asserts: "Men are career oriented" as a justification to refrain from enacting the new policy. Since Timo uses his assertion as a justification to refrain from future action, it can, in the context of conversation, be interpreted as making an essentialist, projective claim about men. However, according to the social norms of the community, men are expected to put lots of time and effort into developing their working careers. This, in turn, entails that it is not an essential property of men that they are career oriented. If the majority of men are career oriented, it is a result of high level of norm conformity. Thus, since Timo's assertion is interpreted as making an essentialist claim, his assertion is judged as false.

The cases presented here demonstrate that in contexts of practical reasoning, one might end up making a false assertion when one asserts a generic in a conversation. In particular, if one asserts a generic as a premise in reasoning, one ends up making a false assertion. What exactly is wrong with making false assertions? The trouble is if the knowledge norm of assertion holds,

then we often believe what others assert – we even might take others' assertions as part of our total evidence. Thus, the fact that generics are context-sensitive expressions calls for responsible communication.

5 Conclusion

Haslanger argues that the norm of Assumed Objectivity should be rejected because adopting the norm under the conditions of gender inequality hurts the interests of women while serving the interests of men. Adopting the norm essentialises women's behaviour thereby making efforts at social change unmotivated. Langton's criticises the norm from the point of rationality: the norm, says Langton, yields epistemically flawed beliefs due to which the norm should be rejected by the lights of some fundamental norms of rationality. The present account continues the line of criticism started off by Langton. In this thesis, I have argued that there is a rational justification for rejecting the norm of Assumed Objectivity: adopting the norm fails to yield knowledge.

I have argued that generics are implicitly quantified expressions. I have applied this semantic feature of generics in demonstrating that generalising beliefs can contain two types of propositions: essentialising and non-essentialising. I have explained how adopting the norm of Assumed Objectivity yields generalising beliefs with essentialising content. I have demonstrated that while such beliefs may be true, but they fail to constitute knowledge because they are insensitive – they fail to track truth in various other circumstances. Since the norm of Assumed Objectivity fails to yield knowledge, it deserves to be rejected.

I have pointed out that if generics are implicitly quantified sentences, then it means that they are context-sensitive expressions. That is to say, the content of a particular generic is determined by the context of utterance. Now, what follows from the context-sensitivity of generics is that in contexts of practical reasoning, if one were to assert a generic as a premise to justify action or inaction, one would be making a false assertion. This is problematic because we often believe what others tell us. We tend to take others' assertions as part of our own evidence. Therefore, the fact that generics are context-sensitive expression calls for responsible communication.

Abstract

Sally Haslanger (2013) has described a particular norm of objectivity, the norm of Assumed Objectivity, that she considers as morally problematic. This norm, when correctly applied, permits one to form essentialising beliefs about women. According Haslanger, under the conditions of gender inequality, adopting hurts the interest of women while serving the interests of men. Rae Langton (1993), in contrast, has argued that a moral critique of the norm has its shortcomings: if a particular norm is bad for some and good for others, then the grounds for rejecting the norm are weak. Thus, Langton has provided a non-moral critique of the norm that pertains to the rationality of the norm. She argues that the norm should be rejected because it fails to yield knowledge. Evangelia Papadaki (2008) has pointed to an inconsistency in Langton's argument thereby concluding that the norm evades Langton's non-moral critique. In this thesis, I will set out to argue the norm is vulnerable to a non-moral critique. I will argue that the beliefs arrived at fail to constitute knowledge, which gives us a rational justification to reject the norm of Assumed Objectivity.

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